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ABSTRACT

Several factors are related to adult students' completion or noncompletion of reading assignments before class--lack of study time, their motivation for taking college classes, their need to feel involved in the learning process, and their expectations for success in the classroom. One of the biggest fears of adults returning to a school environment is the subject of "testing." A study was implemented by a community college teacher to analyze an approach using study guides to help students reduce stress toward testing and develop critical reading and thinking skills. The guides were made up of 30 multiple-choice questions taken from the publisher's test bank. Because the teacher covered two chapters each week in class, 15 questions were taken from each chapter. Before students began on the study guide, they did a relaxation, deep breathing exercise and listened to specially selected baroque music to help relieve stress. During the first part of each class, students completed the study guide (multiple-choice statements) using an open-book format. After completion of the study guide, the teacher and students discussed the answers and the teacher introduced various topics covered in the chapter. In addition to the relaxation exercises, the teacher gave reassuring comments to reduce student tension. A benefit of this method was that students received immediate feedback, were familiar with the chapters, developed confidence in participating in class discussion, had a sense of control in their own learning, and were motivated to learn. The study guides were used to prepare for the "Exit Inventory" that students completed at the end of the course. At that time, no book or notes were used. Results from the Exit Inventories were very encouraging in demonstrating recognition of previously learned study guides. (A 10-item bibliography is attached.) (NLL)

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"I Just Didn't Have Enough Time..."

Assisting the Busy Adult Learner Develop Critical Reading and Thinking Skills

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"I Just Didn't Have Enough Time..."

Assisting the Busy Adult Learner

Develop Critical Reading and Thinking Skills

One of the biggest challenges and dilemma facing todays adult learner attending the community college is trying to find enough time between juggling various familial and occupational responsibilities and devoting quality time reading and studying before a class session. Being able to read and study in a relaxed environment, concentrating, reflecting and receiving feedback is a luxury all students would like to have.

Adults Want To Be Successful

Most adults come to learning activities for specific reasons. These reasons are based on what they think they need-social interaction, new skills, some type of certification, or they're simply bored. Involvement in the learning process is crucial for the adult student to find personal meaning towards some kind of goal. If this does not happen, "This is a waste of time attitude" will prevail and the student will drop out or go elsewhere.

If there's a problem experiencing or even expecting success their motivation for learning will usually be effected. There are many theories and research studies to support this notion.

Ironically, some instructors think the adult learner wants fewer requirements because they don't want to do the work; would like the easy way out. My experience has led me to believe adult learners want to make sure they have enough time to fully demonstrate their real abilities.

As an instructor, it would be very easy to put the blame on students' unrealistic expectation of work involved in a college level course, poor time management, or lack of motivation that causes some students not to read chapter assignments before class. Yet, how many times have I prepared an interesting topic directly from a chapter hoping to elicit a lot of student participation and interaction and only a few students (if they had a chance to read) become involved.

Open-Book Study Guides

One of the biggest fears of adults returning to a school environment is the subject of "testing". I have implemented an approach to assist students in decreasing stress toward testing and develop critical reading and thinking skills.

A study guide is made up of thirty multiple-choice questions taken from the publishers test bank. I attempt to cover two chapters a week, therefore fifteen questions are taken from each chapter. I teach either two days a week for one hour and forty minutes or one night a week for three hours.

I would like to believe all students take the time to carefully read the assigned chapters before class. Some do; most don't.

Before students begin on the study guide, they do a relaxation, deep breathing exercise to release any tension or anxiety they may be feeling. As they're working on the study guide, specially selected baroque music is playing softly in the background. According to research, baroque music with its stable composition and unique rhythmical structure is particularly conducive with both fast and slow movements for long-term memory enhancement, productivity and stress-reduction. Students indicate the music is soothing and helps with better concentration. During the first part of class, students complete the study guide utilizing an open-book format. The student is to identify (circle) the **correct answer** and indicate the **page** where the answer appears in the chapter. The multiple-choice statements are of two basic kinds. Most items are drawn fairly directly from the chapter. These emphasize understanding as well as rote learning, and they represent varied levels of difficulty. Interspersed throughout these traditional items are others that can be described as "general", "conceptual", or "applied". Such "real world" items require thought or analysis. A few of the conceptual items are quite difficult, but most simply require students to extrapolate concepts-critical reading and thinking-into new situations or to deal with examples not used in the text. Students are encouraged

to challenge (and often do!) me or the text if they believe their answer is correct.

After completion of the study guide (usually completed in an hour and a half) we go over the study guide in a discussion format, then I introduce various topics covered in the chapter. Initially, students experience stress because they view the process as a "test". In addition to a relaxation exercise, I give reassuring comments they will do great in the study guides and I'm available if they need my assistance. Students receive immediate feedback, have "read" the chapters, develop confidence in participating in class discussion, have a sense of control in their own learning, and are motivated to learn. I want students to read for understanding; not memorization.

Remembering More

The study guides (10) are used to prepare for the "Exit Inventory" students will complete at the end of the course. At that time no book or notes are used. The inventory is made up of seventy-five statements selected from the study guides. Students will only circle the correct answer to each multiple-choice statement. Results from the Exit Inventories are very encouraging in demonstrating recognition (enhancement of long-term memory) of previously learned study guides. Student evaluations are very positive toward this methodology. In addition, scores tend to be higher than when I give traditional tests.

In the final analysis, students seem to be more interested and challenged and seem to remember more with the great stress and anxieties of memorization for memorization's sake removed from their learning task.

Our understanding of the type of learners we have and the amount of time they can realistically afford is a necessary consideration to explore before we create our course outline.

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